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### FULL STORY

#### West Valley cities reach agreement for I-10 widening

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Work to widen Interstate 10 may get under way in early 2008 now that the three Southwest Valley cities paying to accelerate the project have reached an agreement.

Over the last few weeks, Avondale, Goodyear and Litchfield Park have been bickering over how to divvy up \$1 million of the \$7 million approved by the Maricopa Association of Governments to offset their out of pocket expenses.

On Sept. 27 each city approved a new intergovernmental agreement that would split \$6 million of the funds according to lane miles. Of the remaining \$1 million, \$500,000 will be divided among Avondale, Goodyear and Litchfield Park and \$500,000 will go to Avondale and Litchfield Park only.

Goodyear will pay \$1.8 million, Avondale will pay nearly \$800,000 and Litchfield Park will pay \$58,000 of the remaining interest costs.

The State Transportation Board held a special meeting on Sept. 28 and approved the agreement after a short executive session meeting called for clarification on legal questions by the board.

"It would have been my preference to have the full \$10 million go to reimburse the cities," said Felipe Zubia, transportation board member. "There wasn't an agreement between the cities to pay it on their own."

Board member Bill Feldmeier said he agreed but understands these are the cards that have been dealt. Zubia thanked Representative John Nelson for playing the large part that he did in working with the three cities getting them on the same page and through this grueling widening project.

State Transportation Board Vice Chairman Si Shorr said he understood the portion of the freeway planned to be widened, between the Loop 101 and Sarival Road, is a serious safety issue and understands the need of the acceleration of this widening project and the need for it to move forward.

Litchfield Park Mayor Tom Schoaf said the three cities decided to put their differences aside when the Arizona Department of Transportation informed them the project would be delayed by a few months if it didn't go out to bid next week.

"ADOT had two other projects it needed to get out to bid ... and they would have too many projects out at one time if they waited on I-10," Schoaf said. "It was very quick to get us all to agree, but we were successful."

The cities have been working towards a solution to divide the funding responsibilities for the interest costs related to accelerating the widening of I-10. Last month, the MAG Regional Council approved \$7 million for the three cities to offset their interest costs for this project, which will allow the project to move ahead four years sooner than originally scheduled in the Regional Transportation Plan.

But dividing up that approved amount between the cities wasn't easy to agree on.

"It's still not a bad deal," Avondale Mayor Marie Lopez Rogers said. "When we are all not happy, it's usually a good compromise. We need to get it done."

The disagreement between the three cities began in August when the Maricopa Association of Government approved \$6 million of \$10 million originally allotted by state legislature for the widening of I-10.

Goodyear approved an intergovernmental agreement to share the funding with Avondale and Litchfield Park, but both cities decided instead to seek more funding.

"The reason for Goodyear's willingness to accept the low figure of \$6 million is due to our determination to get the road widened without further delay," said Goodyear Mayor Jim Cavanaugh, prior to his vote to approve the latest agreement. "Whether the cities were to receive \$6 million, \$7 million or \$10 million, none of these numbers compare to the value of a single life we risk by delaying I-10 widening."

In September, MAG approved the extra \$1 million. In following weeks, both Avondale and Litchfield Park approved an intergovernmental agreement that would split the additional funding between themselves, citing Goodyear's lack of involvement in obtaining more funding.

Schoaf said during the latest agreement, the three cities agreed to refrain from making any further disparaging statements regarding each other's actions.

"This exchange in the newspapers was inappropriate and we agreed it would stop," Schoaf said. "Unfortunately, Mayor Cavanaugh did not comply. He chose to make various statements about Litchfield Park and Avondale."

Prior to his vote to approve the latest agreement Goodyear Mayor Jim Cavanaugh summarized the details leading up to the events based on what he described as "the facts."

Cavanaugh said the end result is exactly what he originally proposed prior to the first vote with MAG in August.

According to Cavanaugh, it was common knowledge Phoenix would call for a weighted vote if the \$10 million allotted to reimburse the cities was approved. With that in mind, Cavanaugh said he approached the Mayors of Avondale and Litchfield Park about accepting \$7 million and both refused. By the end of the night, and after several votes, MAG agreed to \$6 million.

"In sum, there is reason to believe we missed the opportunity for \$7 million and even \$8 million in August," he said. "Now here we are in late September arguing over how to distribute \$1 million."

While Cavanaugh said he believes the agreement is still unfair to Goodyear, he voted to approve it to avoid further delay.

"If we fight it today, we delay I-10 by a couple more months and that is inexcusable and unacceptable," Cavanaugh said.

Avondale was, as the other cities, focused on moving the project forward.

"Our goal was to move the project forward as expeditiously as possible while keeping the burden on taxpayers minimal," Rogers said.

"We did the best we could for our residents," Rogers said.

The project will widen I-10 between Loop 101 and Sarival Road four years ahead of schedule. The total estimated cost has already increased from \$135 million to \$153 million due to an increase in design costs for the second phase of the roadwork, said Goodyear City Attorney Roric Massey.

The first phase will take place in the median with the addition of an HOV lane and one general purpose lane. The second phase is the addition of the outside lanes.

Massey said the cities planed ahead for cost increases between the time the deal was made and when the work was actually completed.

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